

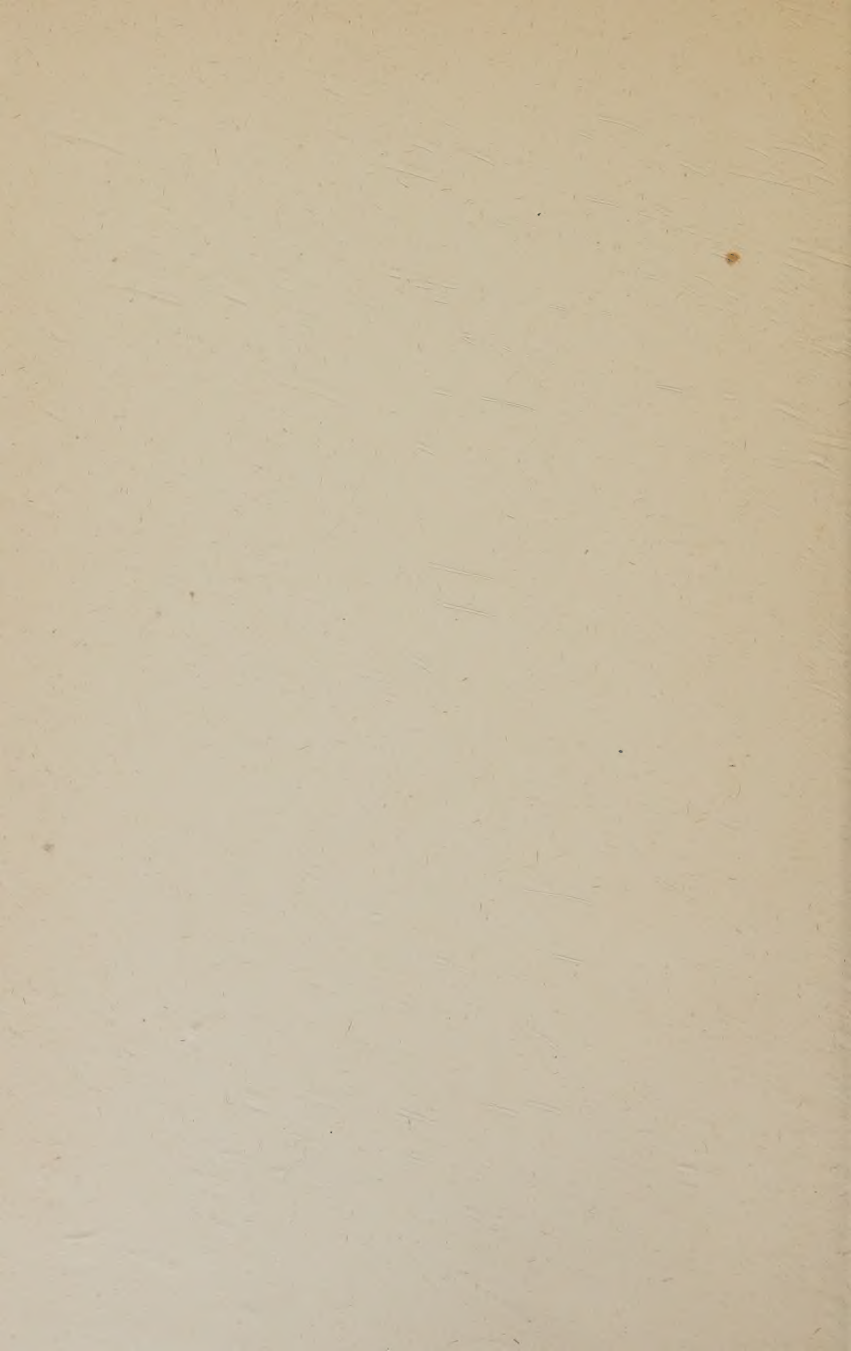


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CREATIVE CRITICISM

CREATIVE CRITICISM

ESSAYS ON THE UNITY OF
GENIUS AND TASTE

BY

J. E. SPINGARN



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To my friend
BENEDETTO CROCE
the most original of all modern
thinkers on Art

NOTE

THREE of the four essays in this volume have already appeared in print. The first, "The New Criticism," was delivered as a lecture at Columbia University in 1910, and was published, under the title of "Literary Criticism," in the *Columbia University Lectures on Literature*; "Dramatic Criticism and the Theatre" was published in the fourth volume of *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association* (Oxford: Clarendon Press); and "Creative Connoisseurship" was written as a letter to an artist friend and was printed in the *New York Evening Post*. All of them have undergone more or less alteration, and a few passages taken from an article on "The Seven Arts and the Seven Confusions" in the *Seven Arts* have been added to them. The essays are now gathered together in the hope that they may stimulate interest in a province of æsthetic theory which has been largely neglected by the English-speaking world.

“Who can doubt that Criticism, as well as Poetry, can have wings?”

BARBEY D'AUREVILLY.

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THE NEW CRITICISM

THE NEW CRITICISM

“WHAT droll creatures these college professors are whenever they talk about art,” wrote Flaubert in one of his letters, and voiced the world’s opinion of academic criticism. For the world shares the view of the Italian poet that “monks and professors cannot write the lives of poets,” and looks only to those rich in literary experience for its opinions on literature. But the poets themselves have had no special grudge against academic criticism that they have not felt equally for every other kind. For the most part, they have objected to all criticism, since what each mainly seeks in his own case is not criticism, but uncritical praise. “Kill the dog, he is a reviewer,” cried the young Goethe; and in an age nearer our own William Morris expressed his contempt for those

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who earn a livelihood by writing their opinions of the works of others. Fortunately for Criticism, it does not live by the grace of poets, to whom it can be of small service at its best, but by the grace of others who have neither the poet's genius nor the critic's insight. I hope to persuade you this evening that the poets have been mistaken in their very conception of the critic's craft, which lives by a power that poets and critics share together. The secret of this power has come to men slowly, and the knowledge they have gained by it has transformed their idea of Criticism. What this secret is, and into what new paths Criticism is being led by it, is the subject of my lecture to-night.

I

At the end of the last century, France once more occupied the center of that stage whose auditors are the inheritors of European civilization. Once more all the world listened while she talked and played, and

some of the most brilliant of her talk was now on the question of the authority of Criticism. It is not my purpose to tell you (what you know already) with what sober and vigorous learning the official critics of the *Revue des deux Mondes* espoused the cause of old gods with the new weapons of science, and with what charm and tact, with what grace and suppleness of thought, Jules Lemaître and Anatole France, to mention no others, defended the free play of the appreciative mind. Some of the sparks that were beaten out on the anvil of controversy have become fixed stars, the classical utterances of Criticism, as when Anatole France described the critic not as a judge imposing sentence, but as a sensitive soul detailing his "adventures among masterpieces."

To have sensations in the presence of a work of art and to express them, that is the function of Criticism for the impressionistic critic. His attitude he would express somewhat in this fashion: "Here is

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a beautiful poem, let us say Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. To read it is for me to experience a thrill of pleasure. My delight in it is itself a judgment, and what better judgment is it possible for me to give? All that I can do is to tell how it affects me, what sensations it gives me. Other men will derive other sensations from it, and express them differently; they too have the same right as I. Each of us, if we are sensitive to impressions and express ourselves well, will produce a new work of art to replace the work which gave us our sensations. That is the art of Criticism, and beyond that Criticism cannot go."

We shall not begrudge this exquisite soul the pleasure of his sensations or his cult of them, nor would he be disconcerted if we were to point out that the interest has been shifted from the work of art to his own impressions. Let us suppose that you say to him: "We are not interested in you, but in *Prometheus Unbound*. To describe the state of your health is not to help us to

understand or to enjoy the poem. Your criticism constantly tends to get away from the work of art, and to center attention on yourself and your feelings."

But his answer would not be difficult to find: "What you say is true enough. My criticism tends to get farther and farther from the work of art and to cast a light upon myself; but all criticism tends to get away from the work of art and to substitute something in its place. The impressionist substitutes himself, but what other form of criticism gets closer to *Prometheus Unbound*? Historical criticism takes us away from it in a search of the environment, the age, the race, the poetic school of the artist; it tells us to read the history of the French Revolution, Godwin's *Political Justice*, the *Prometheus Bound* of Æschylus, and Calderón's *Mágico Prodigioso*. Psychological criticism takes me away from the poem, and sets me to work on the biography of the poet; I wish to enjoy *Prometheus Unbound*, and instead

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I am asked to become acquainted with Shelley the man. Dogmatic criticism does not get any closer to the work of art by testing it according to rules and standards; it sends me to the Greek dramatists, to Shakespeare, to Aristotle's *Poetics*, possibly to Darwin's *Origin of Species*, in order that I may see how far Shelley has failed to give dramatic reality to his poem, or has failed to observe the rules of his *genre*; but that means the study of other works, and not of *Prometheus Unbound*. *Æsthetics* takes me still farther afield into speculations on art and beauty. And so it is with every form of Criticism. Do not deceive yourself. All criticism tends to shift the interest from the work of art to something else. The other critics give us history, politics, biography, erudition, metaphysics. As for me, I re-dream the poet's dream, and if I seem to write lightly, it is because I have awakened, and smile to think I have mistaken a dream for reality. I at least strive to replace one work of art

by another, and art can only find its *alter ego* in art."

It would be idle to detail the arguments with which the advocates of the opposing forms of Criticism answered these questionings. Literary erudition and evolutionary science were the chief weapons used to fight this modern heresy, but the one is an unwieldy and the other a useless weapon in the field of æsthetic thought. On some sides, at least, the position of the impressionists was impregnable; but two points of attack were open to their opponents. They could combat the notion that taste is a substitute for learning, or learning a substitute for taste, since both are vital for Criticism; and they could maintain that the relativity of taste does not in any sense affect its authority. In this sense impressionistic Criticism erred only less grievously than the "judicial" Criticism which opposed it.

But these arguments are not my present concern; what I wish to point out is that

the objective and dogmatic forms of Criticism were fighting no new battle against impressionistic Criticism in that decade of controversy. It was a battle as old as the earliest reflection on the subject of poetry, if not as old as the sensitiveness of poets. Modern literature begins with the same doubts, with the same quarrel. In the sixteenth century the Italians were formulating that classical code which imposed itself on Europe for two centuries, and which, even in our generation, Brunetière has merely disguised under the trappings of natural science. They evolved the dramatic unities, and all those rules which the poet Pope imagined to be "Nature still but Nature methodized." But at the very moment when their spokesman Scalliger was saying that "Aristotle is our emperor, the perpetual dictator of all the fine arts," another Italian, Pietro Aretino, was insisting that there is no rule except the whim of genius and no standard of judgment beyond individual taste.

The Italians passed on the torch to the French of the seventeenth century, and from that day to this the struggle between the two schools has never ceased to agitate the progress of Criticism in France. Boileau against Saint-Évremond, Classicists against Romanticists, dogmatists against impressionists,—the antinomy is deep in the French nature, indeed in the nature of Criticism itself. Listen to this: “It is not for the purpose of deciding on the merit of this noble poet [Virgil], nor of harming his reputation, that I have spoken so freely concerning him. The world will continue to think what it does of his beautiful verses; and as for me, I judge nothing, I only say what I think, and what effect each of these things produces on my heart and mind.” Surely these words are from the lips of Lemaître himself! “I judge nothing; I only say what I feel.” But no, these are the utterances of the Chevalier de Méré, a wit of the age of Louis XIV, and he is writing to the secretary of that stronghold

of authority, the French Academy. For some men, even in the age of Boileau, criticism was nothing but an "adventure among masterpieces."

No, it is no new battle; it is the perpetual conflict of Criticism. In every age impressionism (or enjoyment) and dogmatism (or judgment) have grappled with one another. They are the two sexes of Criticism; and to say that they flourish in every age is to say that every age has its masculine as well as its feminine criticism,—the masculine criticism that may or may not force its own standards on literature, but that never at all events is dominated by the object of its studies; and the feminine criticism that responds to the lure of art with a kind of passive ecstasy. In the age of Boileau it was the masculine type which gave the tone to Criticism; in our own, outside of the universities, it has certainly been the feminine. But they continue to exist side by side, ever falling short of their highest powers, unless mystically mated,

—judgment erecting its edicts into arbitrary standards and conventions, enjoyment lost in the mazes of its sensuous indecision.

Yet if we examine these opposing forms of Criticism in our own age, we shall find, I think, that they are not wholly without a common ground to meet on; that, in fact, they are united in at least one prepossession which they do not share with the varying forms of Criticism in any of the earlier periods of its history. The Greeks conceived of literature, not as an inevitable expression of creative power, but as a reasoned “imitation” or re-shaping of the materials of life; for Aristotle, poetry is the result of man’s imitative instinct, and differs from history and science in that it deals with the probable or possible rather than with the real. The Romans conceived of literature as a noble art, intended (though under the guise of pleasure) to inspire men with high ideals of life. The classicists of the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries accepted this view in the main; for them, literature was a kind of exercise,—a craft acquired by study of the classics, and guided in the interpretation of nature by the traditions of Greek and Roman art. For these men literature was as much a product of reason as science or history. The eighteenth century complicated the course of Criticism by the introduction of vague and novel criteria, such as “imagination,” “sentiment,” and “taste,” yet it was only in part able to liberate itself from the older tradition.

But with the Romantic Movement there developed the new idea which coördinates all Criticism in the nineteenth century. Very early in the century, Mme. de Staël and others formulated the idea that literature is an “expression of society.” Victor Cousin founded the school of art for art’s sake, enunciating “the fundamental rule, that expression is the supreme law of art.” Later, Sainte-Beuve developed and illustrated his theory that lit-

erature is an expression of personality. Still later, under the influence of natural science, Taine took a hint from Hegel and elaborated the idea that literature is an expression of race, age, and environment. The extreme impressionists prefer to think of art as the exquisite expression of delicate and fluctuating sensations or impressions of life. But for all these critics and theorists, literature is an expression of something, of experience or emotion, of the external or internal, of the man himself or something outside the man; yet it is always conceived of as an art of expression.

The objective, the dogmatic, the impressionistic critics of our day may set for themselves very different tasks, but the idea of expression is implicit in all they write. They have, as it were, this bond of blood: they are not merely man and woman, but brother and sister; and their father, or grandfather, was Sainte-Beuve. The bitter but acute analysis of his talent

which Nietzsche has given us in the *Twilight of the Idols* brings out very clearly this dual side of his seminal power, the feminine sensitiveness and the masculine detachment. For Nietzsche, he is "nothing of a man; he wanders about, delicate, curious, tired, pumping people, a female after all, with a woman's revengefulness and a woman's sensuousness, a critic without a standard, without firmness, and without backbone." Here it is the impressionist in Sainte-Beuve that arouses the German's wrath. But in the same breath we find Nietzsche blaming him for "holding up objectivity as a mask;" and it is on this objective side that Sainte-Beuve becomes the source of all those historical and psychological forms of critical study which have influenced the academic thought of our day, leading insensibly, but inevitably, from empirical investigation to empirical law. The pedigree of the two schools thereafter is not difficult to trace: on the one side, from Sainte-

Beuve through *l'art pour l'art* to impressionism, and on the other, from Sainte-Beuve through Taine to Brunetière and his egregious kin.

French criticism has been leaning heavily on the idea of expression for a century or more, but no attempt has been made in France to understand its æsthetic content, except for a few vague echoes of German thought. For the first to give philosophic precision to the theory of expression, and to found a method of Criticism based upon it, were the Germans of the age that stretches from Herder to Hegel. All the forces of philosophical thought were focused on this central concept, while the critics enriched themselves from out this golden store. I suppose you all remember the famous passage in which Carlyle describes the achievement of German criticism in that age. "Criticism," says Carlyle, "has assumed a new form in Germany. It proceeds on other principles and proposes to itself a higher aim. The

main question is not now a question concerning the qualities of diction, the coherence of metaphors, the fitness of sentiments, the general logical truth in a work of art, as it was some half century ago among most critics, neither is it a question mainly of a psychological sort to be answered by discovering and delineating the peculiar nature of the poet from his poetry, as is usual with the best of our own critics at present; but it is, not indeed exclusively, but inclusively, of its two other questions, properly and ultimately a question of the essence and peculiar life of the poetry itself. . . . The problem is not now to determine by what mechanism Addison composed sentences and struck out similitudes, but by what far finer and more mysterious mechanism Shakespeare organized his dramas and gave life and individuality to his Ariel and his Hamlet. Wherein lies that life; how have they attained that shape and individuality? Whence comes that empyrean fire which irradiates their whole being,

and pierces, at least in starry gleams, like a diviner thing, into all hearts? Are these dramas of his not veri-similar only, but true; nay, truer than reality itself, since the essence of unmixed reality is bodied forth in them under more expressive similes? What is this unity of pleasures; and can our deeper inspection discern it to be indivisible and existing by necessity because each work springs as it were from the general elements of thought and grows up therefrom into form and expansion by its own growth? Not only who was the poet and how did he compose, but what and how was the poem, and why was it a poem and not rhymed eloquence, creation and not figured passion? These are the questions for the critic. Criticism stands like an interpreter between the inspired and the un-inspired; between the prophet and those who hear the melody of his words, and catch some glimpse of their material meaning, but understand not their deeper import."

I am afraid that no German critic wholly

realized this ideal; but it was at least the achievement of the Germans that they enunciated the doctrine, even if they did not always adequately illustrate it in practice. It was they who first realized that art has performed its function when it has expressed itself; it was they who first conceived of Criticism as the study of expression. "There is a destructive and a creative or constructive criticism," said Goethe; the first measures and tests literature according to mechanical standards, the second answers the fundamental questions: "What has the writer proposed to himself to do? and how far has he succeeded in carrying out his own plan?" Carlyle, in his essay on Goethe, almost uses Goethe's own words, when he says that the critic's first and foremost duty is to make plain to himself "what the poet's aim really and truly was, how the task he had to do stood before his eye, and how far, with such materials as were afforded him, he has fulfilled it."

This has been the central problem, the guiding star, of all modern criticism. From Coleridge to Pater, from Sainte-Beuve to Lemaître, this is what critics have been striving for, even when they have not succeeded; yes, even when they have been deceiving themselves into thinking that they were striving for something else. This was not the ideal of the critics of Aristotle's day, who, like so many of their successors, censured a work of art as "irrational, impossible, morally hurtful, self-contradictory, or contrary to technical correctness." This was not Boileau's standard when he blamed Tasso for the introduction of Christian rather than pagan mythology into epic poetry; nor Addison's, when he tested *Paradise Lost* according to the rules of Le Bossu; nor Dr. Johnson's, when he lamented the absence of poetic justice in *King Lear*, or pronounced dogmatically that the poet should not "number the streaks of the tulip." What has the poet tried to do, and how

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has he fulfilled his intention? What is he striving to express and how has he expressed it? What impression does his work make on me, and how can I best express this impression? These are the questions that modern critics have been taught to ask when face to face with the work of a poet. Only one *caveat* must be borne in mind when attempting to answer them: the poet's intentions must be judged at the moment of the creative act, as mirrored in the work of art itself, and not by the vague ambitions which he imagines to be his real intentions before or after the creative act is achieved.

II

The theory of expression, the concept of literature as an art of expression, is the common ground on which critics have met for a century or more. Yet how many absurdities, how many complicated systems, how many confusions have been superimposed on this fundamental idea;

and how slowly has its full significance become the possession of critics! To accept the naked principle is to play havoc with these confusions and complications; and no one has seen this more clearly, or driven home its inevitable consequences with more intelligence and vigor, than an Italian thinker and critic of our own day, Benedetto Croce, who has been gaining ground in the English-speaking world from the day when Mr. Balfour, seven or eight years ago, gave him a kind of official introduction in his Romanes Lecture. But I for one needed no introduction to his work; under his banner I enrolled myself long ago, and here re-enroll myself in what I now say. He has led æsthetic thought inevitably from the concept that art is expression to the conclusion that all expression is art. Time does not permit, nor reason ask, that we should follow this argument through all its *pros* and *cons*. If this theory of expression be once and for all accepted, as indeed it has been partly

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though confusedly accepted by all modern critics, the ground of Criticism is cleared of its dead lumber and its weeds. I propose now merely to point out this dead lumber and these weeds. In other words, we shall see to what conclusions the critical thought and practice of a century have been inevitably converging, and what elements of the old Criticism and the old literary history are disappearing from the new.

In the first place, we have done with all the old Rules. The very conception of "rules" harks back to an age of magic, and reminds the modern of those mysterious words which the heroes of the fairy-tales are without reason forbidden to utter; the rules are a survival of the savage *taboo*. We find few arbitrary rules in Aristotle, who limited himself to empirical inductions from the experience of literature; but they appear in the later Greek rhetoricians; and in the Romans, empirical induction has been hardened into dogma. Horace lays down the law to the pro-

spective playwright in this manner: "You must never have more than three actors on the stage at any one time; you must never let your drama exceed five acts." It is unnecessary to trace the history of these rules, or to indicate how they increased in number, how they were arranged into a system by the classicists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and how they burdened the creative art of that period. They were never without their enemies. We have seen how Aretino was pitted against Scaliger, Saint-Évremond against Boileau; and in every age the poets have astounded the critics by transgressing rules without the sacrifice of beauty; but it was not until the end of the eighteenth century that the Romanticists banished them from the province of Criticism. The pedantry of our own day has borrowed "conventions" from history and "technique" from science as substitutes for the outworn formulæ of the past; but these are merely new names for the old mechan-

ical rules; and they too will go, when Criticism clearly recognizes in every work of art a spiritual creation governed by its own law.

We have done with the *genres*, or literary kinds. Their history is inseparably bound up with that of the classical rules. Certain works of literature have a general resemblance and are loosely classed together (for the sake of convenience) as lyric, comedy, tragedy, epic, pastoral, and the like; the classicists made of each of these divisions a fixed norm governed by inviolable laws. The separation of the *genres* was a consequence of this law of classicism: comedy should not be mingled with tragedy, nor epic with lyric. But no sooner was the law enunciated than it was broken by an artist impatient or ignorant of its restraints, and the critics have been obliged to explain away these violations of their laws, or gradually to change the laws themselves. But if art is organic expression, and every work of art is to be

interrogated with the question, "What has it expressed, and how completely?" there is no place for the question whether it has conformed to some convenient classification of critics or to some law derived from this classification. The lyric, the pastoral, the epic, are abstractions without concrete reality in the world of art. Poets do not really write epics, pastorals, lyrics, however much they may be deceived by these false abstractions; they express themselves, and this expression is their only form. There are not, therefore, only three, or ten, or a hundred literary kinds; there are as many kinds as there are individual poets. But it is in the field of literary history that this error is most obvious. Shakespeare wrote *King Lear*, *Venus and Adonis*, and a sequence of sonnets. What becomes of Shakespeare, the creative artist, when these three works are separated from one another by the historian of poetry; when they lose their connection with his single creative soul,

and are classified with other works with which they have only a loose and vague relation? To slice up the history of English literature into compartments marked comedy, tragedy, lyric, and the like, is to be guilty of a complete misunderstanding of the meaning of Criticism; and literary history becomes a logical absurdity when its data are not organically related but cut up into sections, and placed in such compartments as these. Only in one sense has any of these terms any profound significance, and that is the use of the word "lyric" to represent the free expressiveness of art. All art is lyrical,—the *Divine Comedy*, *King Lear*, Rodin's "Thinker," the Parthenon, a Corot landscape, a Bach fugue, or Isadora Duncan's dancing, as much as the songs of Heine or Shelley.

We have done with the comic, the tragic, the sublime, and an army of vague abstractions of their kind. These have grown out of the generalizations of the Alexandrian critics, acquiring a new lease of life

in the eighteenth century. Gray and his friend West corresponded with each other on the subject of the sublime; later, Schiller distinguished between the naïve and the sentimental; Jean Paul defined humor, and Hegel defined the tragic. If these terms represent the content of art, they may be relegated to the same category as joy, hate, sorrow, enthusiasm; and we should speak of the comic in the same general way in which we might speak of the expression of joy in a poem. If, on the other hand, these terms represent abstract classifications of poetry, their use in criticism sins against the very nature of art. Every poet re-expresses the universe in his own way, and every poem is a new and independent expression. The tragic does not exist for Criticism, but only Æschylus and Calderón, Shakespeare and Racine. There is no objection to the use of the word tragic as a convenient label for somewhat similar poems, but to find laws for the tragic and to test creative artists

by such laws as these is simply to give a more abstract form to the outworn classical conception of dramatic rules.

We have done with the theory of style, with metaphor, simile, and all the paraphernalia of Græco-Roman rhetoric. These owe their existence to the assumption that style is separate from expression, that it is something which may be added or subtracted at will from the work of art, a flourish of the pen, an external embellishment, instead of the poet's individual vision of reality, "the music of his whole manner of being." But we know that art *is* expression, that it is complete in itself, that to alter it is to create another expression and therefore to create another work of art. If the poet, for example, says of springtime that "'Tis now the blood runs gold," he has not employed a substitute for something else, such as "the blood tingles in our veins;" he has expressed his thought in its completeness, and there is no equivalent for his expression except itself.

"Each perfect in its place; and each content
With that perfection which its being meant."

Such expressions are still called metaphors in the text-books; but metaphor, simile, and all the old terms of classical rhetoric are signs of the zodiac, magical incantations, astrological formulæ, interesting only to antiquarian curiosity. To Montaigne they suggested "the prattle of chambermaids;" to me they suggest rather the drone and singsong of many school-mistresses. We still hear talk of the "grand style," and essays on style continue to be written, like the old "arts of poetry" of two centuries ago. But the theory of styles has no longer a real place in modern thought; we have learned that it is no less impossible to study style as separate from the work of art than to study the comic as separate from the work of the comic artist.

We have done with all moral judgment of literature. Horace said that pleasure and profit are the end of art, and for many

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centuries the critics quarreled over the terms "pleasure" and "profit." Some said that poetry was meant to instruct; some, merely to please; some, to do both. Romantic criticism first enunciated the principle that art has no aim except expression; that its aim is complete when expression is complete; that "beauty is its own excuse for being." It is not the function of poetry to further any moral or social cause, any more than it is the function of bridge-building to further the cause of Esperanto. If the achievement of the poet be to express any material he may select, and to express it with a completeness that we recognize as perfection, obviously morals can play no part in the judgment which Criticism may form of his work. To say that poetry is moral or immoral is as meaningless as to say that an equilateral triangle is moral and an isosceles triangle immoral, or to speak of the immorality of a musical chord or a Gothic arch. It is only conceivable in a world

in which dinner table conversation runs after this fashion: "This cauliflower would be good if it had only been prepared in accordance with international law." "Do you know why my cook's pastry is so good? Because he has never told a lie or seduced a woman." We do not concern ourselves with morals when we test the engineer's bridge or the scientist's researches; indeed we go farther, and say that it is the moral duty of the scientist to disregard any theory of morals in his search for truth. Beauty's world is remote from both these standards; she aims neither at morals nor at truth. Her imaginary creations, by definition, make no pretence to reality, and cannot be judged by reality's tests. The poet's only moral duty, as a poet, is to be true to his art, and to express his vision of reality as well as he can. If the ideals enunciated by poets are not those which we admire most, we must blame not the poets but ourselves: in the world where morals count we have

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failed to give them the proper material out of which to rear a nobler edifice. No critic of authority now tests literature by the standards of ethics.

We have done with the confusion between the drama and the theatre which has permeated dramatic criticism for over half a century. The theory that the drama is not a creative art, but a mere product of the physical exigencies of the theatre, is as old as the sixteenth century. An Italian scholar of that age was the first to maintain that plays are intended to be acted on a stage, under certain restricted physical conditions, and before a large and heterogeneous crowd; dramatic performance has developed out of these conditions, and the test of its excellence is therefore the pleasure it gives to the mixed audience that supports it. This idea was taken hold of by some of the German romanticists, for the purpose of justifying the Shakespearean drama in its apparent divergence from the classical "rules."

Shakespeare cannot be judged by the rules of the Greek theatre (so ran their argument), for the drama is an inevitable product of theatrical conditions; these conditions in Elizabethan England were not the same as those of Periclean Athens; and it is therefore absurd to judge Shakespeare's practice by that of Sophocles. Here at least the idea helped to bring Shakespeare home to many new hearts by ridding the age of mistaken prejudices, and served a useful purpose, as a specious argument may persuade men to contribute to a noble work, or a mad fanatic may rid the world of a tyrant. But with this achievement its usefulness but not its life was ended. It has been developed into a system, and become a dogma of dramatic critics; it is our contemporary equivalent for the "rules" of seventeenth-century pedantry. As a matter of fact, the dramatic artist is to be judged by no other standard than that applied to any other creative artist: what has he tried to ex-

press, and how has he expressed it? It is true that the theatre is not only an art but a business, and the so-called "success" of a play is of vital interest to the theatre in so far as it is a commercial undertaking. "The success may justify the playwright," said an old French critic, "but it may not be so easy to justify the success." The test of "success" is an economic test, and concerns not art or the criticism of art, but political economy. Valuable contributions to economic and social history have been made by students who have investigated the changing conditions of the theatre and the vicissitudes of taste on the part of theatrical audiences; but these have the same relation to Criticism, and to the drama as an art, that a history of the publisher's trade and its influence on the personal fortunes of poets would bear to the history of poetry.

We have done with technique as separate from art. It has been pointed out that style cannot be disassociated from art; and

the false air of science which the term "technique" seems to possess should not blind us to the fact that it too involves the same error. "Technique is really personality; that is the reason why the artist cannot teach it, why the pupil cannot learn it, and why the æsthetic critic can understand it," says Oscar Wilde, in a dialogue on "The Critic as Artist," which, amid much perversity and paradox, is illumined by many flashes of strange insight. The technique of poetry cannot be separated from its inner nature. Versification cannot be studied by itself, except loosely and for convenience; it remains always an inherent quality of the single poem. No two poets ever write in the same metre. Milton's line: —

"These my sky-robcs spun out of Iris' woof"

is called an iambic pentameter; but it is not true that artistically it has something in common with every other line possessing the same succession of syllables and ac-

cents; in this sense it is not an iambic pentameter; it is only one thing; it is the line: —

“These my sky-robes spun out of Iris’ woof.”

We have done with the history and criticism of poetic themes. It is possible to speak loosely of the handling of such a theme as Prometheus by Æschylus and by Shelley, of the story of Francesca da Rimini, by Dante, Stephen Phillips, and D’Annunzio, or the story of King Arthur by Malory and Tennyson; but strictly speaking, they are not employing the same theme at all. Each artist is expressing a certain material and labeling it with an historic name. For Shelley Prometheus is only a label; he is expressing his artistic conception of life, not the history of a Greek Titan. It is the vital flame he has breathed into his work that makes it what it is, and with this vital flame (and not with labels) the critic should concern himself in the works of poets. The same answer must be

given to those critics who insist on the use of contemporary material in poetry, and praise the poets whose subjects are drawn from the life of our own time. But even if it were possible for critics to determine in advance the subject-matter of poetry or to impose subjects on poets, how can a poet deal with anything but contemporary material? How can a twentieth-century poet, even when he imagines that he is concerned with Greek or Egyptian life, deal with any subject but the life of his own time, except in the most external and superficial detail? Cynics have said since the first outpourings of men's hearts, "There is nothing new in art; there are no new subjects." But the very reverse is true. There are no old subjects; every subject is new as soon as it has been transformed by the imagination of the poet.

We have done with the race, the time, the environment of a poet's work as an element in Criticism. To study these phases of a work of art is to treat it as an historic

or social document, and the result is a contribution to the history of culture or civilization, with only a subsidiary interest for the history of art. "Granted the times, the environment, the race, the passions of the poet, what has he done with his materials, how has he converted poetry out of reality?" To answer this question of the Italian De Sanctis as it refers to each single work of art is to perform what is truly the critic's vital function; this is to interpret "expression" in its rightful sense, and to liberate æsthetic Criticism from the vassalage to *Kulturgeschichte* imposed on it by the school of Taine.

We have done with the "evolution" of literature. The concept of progress was first applied to literature in the seventeenth century, but at the very outset Pascal pointed out that a distinction must here be made between science and art; that science advances by accumulation of knowledge, while the changes of art cannot be reduced to any theory of progress. As a

matter of fact, the theory involves the ranking of poets according to some arbitrary conception of their value; and the ranking of writers in order of merit has become obsolete, except in the "hundred best books" of the last decade and the "five-foot shelves" of yesterday. The later nineteenth century gave a new air of verisimilitude to this old theory by borrowing the term "evolution" from science; but this too involves a fundamental misconception of the free and original movement of art. A similar misconception is involved in the study of the "origins" of art; for art has no origin separate from man's life.

"In climes beyond the solar road,
Where shaggy forms o'er ice-built mountains
 roam,
The Muse has broke the twilight-gloom";

but though she wore savage raiment, she was no less the Muse. Art is simple at times, complex at others, but it is always art. The simple art of early times may be

studied with profit; but the researches of anthropology have no vital significance for Criticism, unless the anthropologist studies the simplest forms of art in the same spirit as its highest; that is, unless the anthropologist is an æsthetic critic.

Finally, we have done with the old rupture between genius and taste. When Criticism first propounded as its real concern the oft-repeated question: "What has the poet tried to express and how has he expressed it?" Criticism prescribed for itself the only possible method. How can the critic answer this question without becoming (if only for a moment of supreme power) at one with the creator? That is to say, taste must reproduce the work of art within itself in order to understand and judge it; and at that moment æsthetic judgment becomes nothing more nor less than creative art itself. The identity of genius and taste is the final achievement of modern thought on the subject of art, and it means that fundamentally, in their

most significant moments, the creative and the critical instincts are one and the same. From Goethe to Carlyle, from Carlyle to Arnold, from Arnold to Symons, there has been much talk of the "creative function" of Criticism. For each of these men the phrase held a different content; for Arnold it meant merely that Criticism creates the intellectual atmosphere of the age, — a social function of high importance, perhaps, yet wholly independent of æsthetic significance. But the ultimate truth toward which these men were tending was more radical than that, and plays havoc with all the old platitudes about the sterility of taste. Criticism at last can free itself of its age-long self-contempt, now that it may realize that æsthetic judgment and artistic creation are instinct with the same vital life. This identity does not sum up the whole life of the complex and difficult art of Criticism, but without it, Criticism would really be impossible. "Genius is to

æsthetics what the ego is to philosophy, the only supreme and absolute reality," said Schelling; and without subduing the mind to this transcendental system, it remains true that what must always be inexplicable to mere reflection is just what gives power to poetry; that intellectual curiosity may amuse itself by asking its little questions of the silent sons of light, but they vouchsafe no answer to art's pale shadow, thought; the gods are kind if they give up their secret in another work of art, the art of Criticism, that serves as some sort of mirror to the art of literature, only because in their flashes of insight taste and genius are one.

DRAMATIC CRITICISM
AND THE THEATRE

DRAMATIC CRITICISM AND THE THEATRE

IN one of the largest American Universities there is a room filled with theatrical bric-à-brac which is called "The Dramatic Museum." Actors, theatrical managers, antiquarians, and millionaires have added to a collection begun by the University authorities; and the museum now contains reproductions of the great theatres of the ancient and modern world, masks, prompt-books, playbills, and all the other accessories of the stage. The room may or may not contain collections of plays (for I have never visited it); but in any event, they are subsidiary to the main object of the directors, which is to illustrate the changing conditions of the theatres of the world as an essential introduction to the study of the drama.

Now, there can be no legitimate objec-

tion to the study of theatrical antiquities as a thing in itself. Human curiosity finds a natural satisfaction in searching the past for every manifestation of man's activity and ingenuity; and who shall say that the antiquities of the theatre, that house of a thousand wonders, may not be studied with interest (and even with intelligence) by those who are especially attracted by the stage and its history? Manuscripts, parchments, missals, bindings, and typography are a legitimate object of study for both those who are interested and those who are not interested in the contents of books; and the history of the theatre may furnish amusement both to those who love the drama and to those who care nothing for what the drama really has to offer the souls of men. The professional printer may profitably spend his spare hours in studying the history of printing, without concerning himself with the literature which the printed page gave to the world; the actor may amuse himself

intelligently by ransacking stage memoirs or studying theatrical antiquities, without adding to his knowledge of dramatic poetry; and who shall say them nay? Both printer and actor become students of *Kulturgeschichte* in the process, though, like Monsieur Jourdain, they may not know it; they are both exploring outlying regions in the field of human culture.

But the fact is that the collection in the American University has not been brought together for this reason. It has a far more pretentious purpose than this. It is called a "dramatic" (not merely a theatrical) museum, and those responsible for its existence have brought together their interesting collection because they believe that these theatrical antiquities are an essential instrument of dramatic criticism. They believe that dramatic literature cannot be intelligently studied without an understanding of all that has gone on in the playhouses of the world from the very beginnings of the drama. The shape of

the stage, the scenery, the audience and its characteristics, the lighting of the house, and many other things must be considered and understood before the art of the drama can be understood and appreciated. This raises a serious question of literary theory. For while we were willing to follow the printer's studies in the history of typography, with real interest, and without a careful weighing of the relative merits of printing and other arts and crafts, the case would be quite different if he insisted that we cannot understand the history of literature without studying the history of printing; and we should be especially inclined to examine the merits of his contention if we found that it was accepted without question by a considerable number of literary critics. The thesis of the directors of the "dramatic museum" is a popular one in this age; actors, playwrights, and dramatic critics alike agree with them. What is the history of this thesis, and what are its

merits? What authority in the past has this theory that the criticism of dramatic literature must rest on a knowledge of the conditions of the theatre, and how weighty and convincing does this authority appear? These are the questions which this essay attempts to answer.

It is obvious at the outset that we shall not have to concern ourselves with the general effect of acting or representation on a dramatic work. That professional actors may interpret plays with verve and power and insight beyond the skill of men unaccustomed to visualize or portray human passion and human action; that the actor's art may in a sense vitalize the written word and give it a new magic; that the theatre may add a new and wonderful sensuous beauty to the imagination of the poet,—these are statements which it is wholly unnecessary to contest. So when Voltaire, dedicating his tragedy of *Zulime* to a popular actress of his time, tells her that “without great actors, a play is without life;

it is you who give it its soul; tragedy is intended to be acted even more than to be read," he is stating an opinion which is beyond the scope of this discussion. It would be a simple matter to collect, from dedications and prologues and prefaces, from Marston's *Malcontent* and Webster's *Devil's Law Case* to the published plays of our own day, the *obiter dicta* of practical playwrights who have expressed themselves as dissatisfied with the printed page as the sole or the final medium of expression for dramatic writing. We need not be greatly impressed by these casual and uncritical utterances, which tell us nothing of the creative act that produced the work of art, but merely echo the ambitions which the artist cherishes for the children of his brain after they are born. Indeed, they do not differ fundamentally from the whim of a poet who might maintain that his verses could not be thoroughly appreciated unless they were printed on vellum, in beautiful type, and with wide

margins. But utterances of this kind do not concern us here; for the idea in which for the moment we have a special interest is that the theatre and the drama are not two distinct things, but only one; that the actor and the theatre do not merely externalize the drama, or interpret it, or heighten its effect, but that they *are* the drama; that the drama, in a word, is not so much a creative art born in the brain of the playwright as an historic product shaped by theatres and actors, and therefore not to be understood or studied without reference to them.

Even in this form we find the problem propounded at the very beginnings of dramatic criticism. Aristotle, in the fourth chapter of the *Poetics*, makes a distinction between the consideration of tragedy in itself and its consideration with reference to theatrical representation; but the text of the passage is so corrupt and confusing that it is hardly possible to found a theory, or even shape a clear antithesis,

on the basis of this utterance. In several other passages, however, he has clearly enough stated his point of view. Tragedy, he tells us, has six parts, plot, character, diction, thought, song, and scenery. By the last is meant the spectacle presented by the play upon the stage, the scenery, the *mise en scène*, or perhaps merely the actors in their tragic costume; but at all events the purely theatrical side of a drama. This, he says in the sixth chapter,

“has an emotional attraction of its own, but of all the parts it is the least artistic and connected least with the art of poetry. For the power of tragedy, we may be sure, is felt even apart from representation and actors. Besides, the production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet.”

This statement is repeated and re-enforced with argument throughout the *Poetics*:—in the seventh chapter, where we are told that the length of a play must be determined by an inner need, for

“the limit of length in relation to dramatic competition and sensuous presentment is no part of artistic theory”;

in the fourteenth chapter, where there is a contrast between the superior poet who arouses tragic pity and fear by means of the inner structure of the piece, and the inferior poet who does so by means of the external spectacle of the theatre:

“for the plot ought to be so constructed that, even without the aid of the eye, he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt with pity at what takes place”;

and finally in the twenty-sixth chapter, where Aristotle sharply distinguishes between the poetic and histrionic arts, and tells us that

“tragedy, like epic poetry, produces its true effect even without action; it reveals its power by mere reading.”

Casual references to the part played by actors and the theatre in the make-up of a

play may mislead moderns into thinking that Aristotle is not wholly consistent in this matter. But the fact is that he cannot help thinking of plays in connection with their theatrical representation, any more than most of us can think of men and women without clothes. They belong together by long habit and use; they help each other to be what we commonly think them. But he does not make them identical or mutually inclusive. A play is a creative work of the imagination, and must be considered as such always, and as such only.

From the later Italian Renaissance to the end of the eighteenth century, the *Poetics* found scores, indeed hundreds, of translators and commentators throughout Europe; and Aristotle's position was tamely accepted by virtually every one of them. That this should be so in the Italy of the sixteenth century need excite no wonder, since the traditions of the theatre were still to be created for modern Europe. But in the next century we find even Corneille,

in his three *Discours*, dismissing the whole subject of stage decoration and scenery, because Aristotle said they do not properly concern the poet; and this despite his own complaint that most dramatic critics have discussed the drama as philosophers and grammarians wholly lacking in all experience of the theatre. So Dryden, true to the ideals of his master Corneille, tells us that it is his ambition as a playwright to be *read*: "that, I am sure, is the more lasting and the nobler design." So the great French scholar, Dacier, at the end of the seventeenth century, admits that while stage decoration adds to the beauty of a play, it makes the piece in itself neither better nor worse; and yet he feels that it is valuable for the poet to understand the theatre, in order that he may know whether his play is well acted and whether the scenery is proper to the piece. So in the middle of the next century, Voltaire, in the notes to the tragedy of *Olympie*, says:

"What has the stage decoration to do with the merit of a poem? If the success depends on what strikes the eyes, we might as well have moving pictures!"

And so at the end of the same century, the poet laureate Pye, if we may dare to disinter his work in the face of Byron's and the world's contempt, says in his commentary on the *Poetics* :

"There are few good tragedies in which the effect is not in general at least as forcible in the closet as on the stage, even in the modern theatre. In the strongly impassioned parts, where every other consideration of effect is lost in feeling, we are wonderfully moved by the natural efforts of a Garrick or a Siddons; but this is independent of the stage effect, and would be as strong in a room as on the stage."

The first to challenge this theory of the drama was a scholar and critic of the later Renaissance, Lodovico Castelvetro, who published an Italian version of Aristotle's *Poetics* in 1570. The version is embedded, one might almost say lost, in an elabo-

rate commentary of over three hundred thousand words, which covers the whole field of literary theory with remarkable thoroughness and with even more remarkable independence of mind. Indeed, this independence of mind gained for him the rancor of classicists in all the countries of Europe for a century or more, and several pages might be filled with the protests of continental scholars and critics against what seemed to them the perversity, the heretical doctrines, and the excessive subtlety and acuteness of Castelvetro's book. He was an aggressive controversialist by temperament, belonging to those "literary gladiators of the Renaissance" (as Nisard calls them) who regarded scholarship as an instrument of logical disputation as much as (if not more than) a means of uncovering buried truth. It is easy for any shallowpate to disagree with Aristotle now; but when we consider that the theory of Aristotelian infallibility in letters died hard even at the end of the

eighteenth century, and that even Lessing thought the *Poetics* as infallible in criticism as Euclid in geometry, we must salute the commentator who did not fear to take direct issue with Aristotle at the end of the sixteenth century.

Castelvetro certainly takes issue with Aristotle on the question whether the drama exhibits its real power in the study or in the theatre. "Non è vero quello che Aristotele dice," he says: it simply is not true, what Aristotle says, that the value of a play can be discovered by reading in the same way as by theatrical representation, for the reason that a few highly gifted and imaginative men might be able to judge a play in this way, whereas every one, the gifted and the ignorant alike, can follow and appreciate a play when it is acted. Nor is it true, he tells us elsewhere, that the same pleasure is derived from the reading of plays as from seeing them on the stage; the pleasure is different in kind, and the peculiar pleasure of a play is to

be derived only from its representation in the theatre. In order to understand what the drama is, and what is the peculiar pleasure that it affords to men, we must examine the conditions of the physical theatre, and realize exactly what is to be found there. The fact that the drama is intended for the stage, that it is to be acted, must form the basis of every true theory of tragedy or comedy.

A number of years ago I pointed out Castelvetro's priority in stating this theory of the theatre, and I can only repeat the summary that I gave of it then. What, according to him, are the conditions of stage representation? The theatre is a public place, in which a play is presented before a motley crowd—*la moltitudine rozza*—upon a circumscribed platform or stage, within a limited space of time. To this idea the whole of Castelvetro's dramatic system is conformed. In the first place, since the audience may be great in number, the theatre must be large, and yet the

audience must be able to hear the play; hence verse is added, not merely as a delightful accompaniment, but also in order that the actors may raise their voices without inconvenience and without loss of dignity. In the second place, the audience is not a select gathering of choice spirits, but a motley crowd of people, drawn to the theatre for the purpose of pleasure or recreation; accordingly, abstruse themes, and in fact all technical discussions, must be avoided by the playwright, who is limited, as we should say to-day, to the elemental passions and interests of men. In the third place, the actors are required to move about on a raised and narrow platform; and this is the reason why deeds of violence, and many other things which cannot be acted on such a platform with convenience and dignity, should not be represented in the drama. And finally, the physical convenience of the people in the audience, who cannot comfortably remain in the theatre without

food and other physical necessities for an indefinite period of time, limits the length of the play to about three or four hours.

Many of Castelvetro's incidental conclusions may seem hopelessly outworn to-day; but the modernity of his system is self-evident, if by modernity we mean agreement with the theories that happen to be most popular in our own time. Certainly, for nearly two centuries, the path which he blazed was not crowded with followers. A few writers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a very few, echo haltingly and intermittently some of his ideas about the relations of the drama and the actual theatre. But it was not until the days of Diderot that they found again systematic and intelligent discussion. In several of Diderot's essays and dialogues,—in his discourse on dramatic poetry, in his famous *Paradox of the Actor*, but more especially in his *Entretiens sur le Fils Naturel*,—the accents of "modernity" are even more apparent than in his Italian predeces-

sor, and one or two notes are sounded that are so much of our own time that it seems difficult to believe they can be older than yesterday.

Diderot's central idea in the *Entretiens* is that the essential part of a play is not created by the poet at all, but by the actor. Gestures, inarticulate cries, facial expressions, movements of the body, a few monosyllables which escape from the lips at intervals are what really move us in the theatre; and to such an extent is this true, that all that really belongs to the poet is the scenario, while words, even ideas and scenes, might be left to the actor to omit, add to, or alter. He himself sketches the scenario of a tragedy in monosyllables, with an exclamation here, the commencement of a phrase there, scarcely ever a consecutive discourse. "There is true tragedy," he cries; "but for works of this kind we need authors, actors, a theatre, and perhaps a whole people!"

Yes, obviously actors, even authors, but

why a theatre and a whole people for drama like this? Because the mere presence of a large number of people assembled together in a theatre has its own special effect that must be considered in every discussion of the drama. Here we meet, although not for the first time, what is now known as the theory of the "psychology of the crowd." Bacon, in the *De Augmentis*, had pointed out the wonderful effectiveness of the theatre as an instrument of public morality, in the hands of ancient playwrights, and explained this effectiveness on the ground that it is a "secret of nature" that men's minds are more open to passions and impressions "congregate than solitary." Before him Castelvetro had estimated the influence of the theatrical audience in general on the nature of the drama, finding it especially in the necessity imposed upon the playwright of avoiding all themes and ideas unintelligible to the miscellaneous gathering at a theatrical performance.

But Diderot finds a dual effect. Mobs and popular revolts make it clear how contagious is passion or excitement in a great concourse of people; self-restraint and decency have no meaning for thousands gathered together, whatever may be the temperament of each individual in the crowd. The effect of the play is heightened for each spectator because there are many spectators to hear and see it together; but the presence of the crowd has a kindred influence on the playwright and the actor. They, too, share the effect of the "psychology of the crowd:" the actor has the crowd before him in fact, the poet in imagination, and both do their work differently than if they were preparing a solitary entertainment. Like the orator on the public platform or the mountebank on the street corner, the playwright must suit his particular audience or he will fail.

This, says Diderot, is the secret of the failure of French tragedy in the eighteenth

century. The Greek drama is the product of a vast amphitheatre, the enormous crowds that frequented it, and the solemn occasions that brought them together; these explain its simplicity of plot, its versification, its dignity and emphasis, all proclaiming a discourse chanted in spacious places and in noble surroundings. The French drama, however, has imitated the emphasis, the versification, the dignity of the Greeks, but without the physical surroundings that made the ancient drama suited to its environment, and without the simplicity of plot and thought that its other methods justify. Simplify the French play and beautify the French stage: this is Diderot's recipe for restoring the glory of Greek drama in the modern world; a larger and more adequate theatre and more beautiful stage decoration are the first prerequisites of reform. It is Voltaire's recipe too: the elimination of petty gallantry from the French drama and the substitution of an adequate edifice for the

“narrow miserable theatre with its poor scenery.”

The world will never cease to seek external cures for inner deficiencies of the human spirit; and yet every age must protest against this form of quackery in its own way. In this case it was left to Lessing to point out Diderot's and Voltaire's more obvious errors. Lessing's *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* was a product of actual contact with the theatre; it is, at least apparently, a discussion of one play after another as Lessing saw them acted on the stage. But out of this accidental succession of theatrical performances he formulates a more or less consistent programme for the development of a new and more vital dramatic literature in his own country; not, however, by means of an improved theatre or more elaborate stage decorations, but by a new and creative impulse in the plays themselves. In the eightieth number of the *Dramaturgie* he answers the theatrical arguments of Vol-

taire and Diderot by an appeal to history. The Shakespearean drama, considered in connection with the poverty of Elizabethan stage decoration, proves conclusively for him that there is no real relation between elaborate scenery or splendid theatrical edifices and great drama itself. Does every tragedy need pomp and display, or should the poet arrange his play so that it will produce its effect without these external aids? Lessing's answer to these questions is identical with Aristotle's. Indeed, he forestalls Lamb's theory that a great play cannot be properly acted at all: "A masterpiece is rarely as well represented as it is written; mediocrity always fares better with the actors."

Still there must lurk a doubt in regard to his consistency. "To what end the hard work of the dramatic form?" he asks; "Why build a theatre, disguise men and women, torture their memories, invite the whole town to assemble at one place, if I intend to produce nothing more with my

work and its representation than some of those emotions that would be produced by any good story that every one could read by his chimney-corner at home?" We may well ask ourselves what Lessing really means by this question. There never was a thing written, lyric, ballad, epic, drama, or what not, that was not strengthened in the impression it makes, by having a noble voice or an exquisite art express it for us. Of course the trained actor gives a new fire and flavor to the drama; of course attendance at a theatre adds pleasures to those derived merely by reading a play in solitude; of course when we have recourse to sound and sight, to music and architecture and painting, in the theatre, we are adding complicated sensations to those that properly spring from the nature of the drama itself. If Lessing means to ask whether these added sensations are worth the cost of building theatres and training actors, who will answer no? But if he means to imply that it would not be worth

building theatres and training actors unless the drama were a *vie manquée* without them, then we can only answer his question by asking some of our own. Why build libraries, train librarians, perfect systems of library administration and bibliography, if we get nothing out of a book in a library that we could not get out of it in our study at home? Why develop the arts of typography and binding, if we can get as much pleasure out of a volume in manuscript as out of a printed book; or why have beautiful type and rich bindings, if we can find the real soul of a book in the cheapest and ugliest of types and bindings? These questions bring with them their own *reductio ad absurdum*; for obviously we build libraries, and develop the arts of typography and binding, for quite other reasons than that books are not books without them, or that the critic must consider any of the three when he is criticizing the content of a book.

Forty years of historical research, of æs-

thetic theory, and of wider acquaintance with the literatures of the world intervened between the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* and Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*; and in these the methods inaugurated by Castelvetro were applied, if not for the first time, at least with the largest amount of consistency, to the actual history of the drama. In Schlegel's first two lectures we find all the theories we have already met, as well as others of kindred intention. The drama is dialogue, but dialogue with conflict and change, and without personal explanation of this conflict or change on the part of the playwright. There is only one way in which this can be done: by having men and women actually represent the characters, imitate their voices and temperaments, and carry on the discourse in surroundings that have some similarity to those imagined by the playwright. Without this help (and this is Schlegel's central idea) dramatic dialogue would de-

mand personal explanation on the part of the playwright to make his meaning clear; that is forbidden by the very idea of drama; and so the theatre is implicit in the nature of drama itself. In the theatre, "where the magic of many combined arts can be displayed," these all help the playwright in "producing an impression on an assembled multitude." Here we are once more faced by the theory of the "psychology of the crowd." According to Schlegel, the main object of the drama is to "produce an impression on an assembled crowd, to gain their attention, and to excite in them interest and participation." The impression is intensified by reason of the numbers that share it: "The effect produced by seeing a number of others share in the same emotions . . . is astonishingly powerful."

For Schlegel, the theatrical and the dramatic are bound together, not only in their very nature, but, as a consequence, in their history. Acting and theatrical per-

formances of greater or lesser complexity are to be found in various primitive ages and among various primitive peoples, and mimicry is innate in man's nature. On these assumptions Schlegel sketches the earlier history of the stage, as indeed Aristotle had done for Greek tragedy, and carries on this history throughout his discussion of the modern drama. The Elizabethan theatre's paucity of stage scenery is cited as proof of the glory of Shakespeare, inasmuch as he was able to give the air of reality, to produce complete illusion, without such adventitious aid. And so Schlegel proceeds in the case of each period of dramatic poetry; indicating the condition of the theatre almost always, but never quite arriving at the more modern conception by which the shape of the theatre or of the stage is regarded as having actually determined the nature of the drama in each age.

The Austrian playwright, Grillparzer, whose prose works abound in critical

acuteness, came to regard Schlegel's lectures as "dangerous;" but the ideas they contained, so far as the relations of drama and theatre are concerned, had a germinal influence on his own dramatic criticism. He was the most aggressive opponent of the "closet-drama" that had yet appeared; and he was relentless in his contempt for all fine writing, soliloquies, and mere poetry that do not contribute to the "action" of a play. He goes so far as to say that the distinction between theatrical and dramatic is false; whatever is one must inevitably be the other. If time and space permitted, it would be interesting to discuss in detail Grillparzer's theories of the drama, especially as they have been neglected by English critics. But the fact is that intellectual hegemony in these matters had already passed to France while Grillparzer was still writing, and we cannot remain longer in the company of German theorists, although many of them have contributed largely, if not al-

ways wisely, to the subject under discussion.

There still remains one period of dramatic theory to consider, the period of theatricalism rampant. The French have been the masters of this form of dramatic criticism, and since the middle of the nineteenth century their footsteps have been followed with little or no protest by the critics of the world. Critics like Mr. A. B. Walkley and Mr. William Archer, not to mention their noisy but negligible echoes in our own country, have little enough to add to what Frenchmen had already said before them on this subject. The extremist in this movement, and indeed in some senses a pioneer, is Francisque Sarcey; and no one has gone further in the direction of making drama and theatre mutually interchangeable terms than he. Doubtless it was of him and his kind that Flaubert was thinking when he wrote to George Sand over forty years ago: "One of the most comical things of our time is this newfangled

theatrical mystery (*l'arcane théâtral*). They tell us that the art of the theatre is beyond the limits of human intelligence, and that it is a mystery reserved for men who write like cab-drivers. The question of success surpasses all others. It is the school of demoralization." Two years after this was written Sarcey summed up his code *in extenso* in an *Essai d'une Esthétique de Théâtre*, which still remains the clearest and most extreme expression of this form of dramatic materialism.

Sarcey assumes three fundamental hypotheses: first, that the only purpose of a play is to please a definite body of men and women assembled in a theatre; secondly, that in order to do this, the playwright is limited, or if you will, aided, by certain tricks and conventions of the theatre; and finally, some of these conventions change from age to age or from country to country, while others are inevitable and eternal. On the basis of these assumptions, he frames this pretty defini-

tion of the drama: "Dramatic art is the ensemble of conventions, universal or local, eternal or temporary, by the aid of which the playwright, representing human life in a theatre, gives to the audience an illusion of truth." *Voilà donc!* Here is the greatness of *Hamlet* and *Oedipus* most simply set down. Here is a definition that makes it an easy matter to understand the greatness of all the great plays of the past! Like nearly all his predecessors from the time of Castelvetro, of whom Sarcey had doubtless never heard, our æsthetician of the theatre places the idea of an audience first. When you think of the theatre, he says, you think of the presence of the public; when you think of a play, you think in the same instant of the public come to hear it. You can omit every other requirement, but you cannot omit the audience. It is the inevitable, the fatal *sine qua non*. To it dramatic art must accommodate all its organs, and from it can be drawn, without a single exception, all the laws of the theatre.

This is Sarcey's fundamental condition in 1876; and it is still fundamental with most of the dramatic critics of to-day. Mr. Walkley, for instance, in a half-solemn, half-facetious review of my lecture on "The New Criticism" which he did me the honor to write for the London *Times* a few years ago, asserts that the dramatic critic can only appraise a play "by an evaluation of the æsthetic pleasure received," and that in order to do this, he must "take into account the peculiar conditions" under which the dramatist works. These peculiar conditions are of course the audience of Sarcey (Mr. Walkley calls it the "peculiar psychology of the crowd he is addressing") and Sarcey's conventions of the theatre (although Mr. Walkley limits them to "the conformation of the stage"). The critic of the *Times* has studied and considered, perhaps more carefully than any of his predecessors, the various vicissitudes of this "conformation of the stage." I have no reason to doubt his authority in the field of

stage history; but his authority ceases in the field of æsthetic theory. A writer who has sense enough to understand that the dramatic critic must "sit tight" against the prejudices and opinions of theatrical audiences, preserving at all hazards his own judgment (I am paraphrasing a lecture of Mr. Walkley on *Dramatic Criticism*), and who in the very next breath tells us that the playwright must be judged by his effect on "the peculiar psychology of the crowd he is addressing," has evidently not mastered the elements of æsthetic logic. As for Francisque Sarcey, who is responsible for so much of this cheap materialism of contemporary dramatic criticism, he seems to me as shallow a dogmatist as ever wrote criticisms of plays for the press; and decent invective can hardly go farther than that.

Now, what is meant by this idea, by no means modern, but in our day more persistent than ever, that the peculiar characteristic of dramatic literature is that it is

intended for an assembled crowd? Obviously not merely that men are more impressionable in crowds than when alone, and that the dramatist has an advantage over most other writers in that he may make his appeal to men when they are most impressionable. This may be Bacon's thought, but it is far from being Diderot's or Schlegel's or Mr. Walkley's. What these men assert is that the crowd is inherent in the very idea of a play, and that this crowd has a peculiar psychology different in kind from that of any individual composing it. Indeed, I believe I have read some flighty utterances of late to the effect that so far from remaining civilized beings, we all revert to our primitive savage state when we become part of a crowd, and that the drama must therefore always appeal to what is primitive and savage in our natures more than any other form of literature. Well, the fact is that all of us are primitive men in spots, and that the theatre may appeal to what is primitive

in us if it chooses; but so does fire, so does shipwreck or drowning, whether we choose or not; and for that matter, to get as far from the crowd as possible, so does solitude. If anything is certain in regard to that strange creature man, it is that in solitudes, what we call civilization is most likely to fall from him; and we might with at least equal truth argue that lyric or didactic poetry, intended to be read in the quiet of a man's study, must appeal to the most primitive instincts in him, and that therefore all lyric or didactic poetry must of necessity deal with more primitive and savage themes than any other forms of literature. But the inner logic of art is independent of these incidental and extraneous classifications of artistic form. All literature makes its appeal to the same spiritual side of man's nature, and the appeal is not altered by any abstract classification, lyric, didactic, dramatic, or what not, which has no higher function than convenience of discussion.

Not only is the crowd different from its constituent individualities, and more primitive in instinct than they (I am of course summarizing the virtues of the imaginary crowd created by modern psychologists and dramatic critics), but it is also inattentive, engrossed in itself, difficult to interest, and the first object of the playwright must be to compel its attention. But the fact is that most men and women (whether in a crowd or by themselves) are without the faculty of intellectual concentration. Great art ignores this and other like frailties of men, in the theatre and out of it; while mediocre art focuses its attention on them, in the novel, in song, ballad, lyric, essay, no less than in drama. A great Italian critic, indeed one of the greatest critics of the modern world, Francesco de Sanctis, gave this famous advice to a young poet anxious to know how he could best serve the higher morals in poetry: "Don't think about morals; that is the best way of serving them in art." In

much the same way, we might say to the playwright: "Don't think about your audience; that is the best way of serving it in the drama."

It will be remembered that Pye, in commenting on Aristotle, pointed out that Garrick or Siddons reciting a dramatic poem in a room might affect us with the same pleasure as if they were acting in the theatre. Now, if we do not prefer rather to err with Mr. Walkley than shine with Pye, we may go a step farther, and assume that the audience of Garrick or Siddons in that little room has been reduced to a single spectator. Will there be any diminution in the power of Garrick or Siddons over him because of the absence of a crowd? Or even assuming that Garrick or Siddons might find a stimulus to added passion in the presence of a large audience, or that our single auditor would feel stimulated also by the crowd in the theatre, how can we for a moment believe that the pleasure he receives in the room is different in its

nature from the pleasure received from the recitation in the crowded theatre? So that even histrionic art, not to mention dramatic art, speaks with the same voice in solitude as in crowds; and all the more then will the drama itself, "even apart from representation and actors", as old Aristotle puts it, speak with its highest power to the imagination fitted to understand and receive it.

No, Mr. Walkley and Brunetière and others like them are right when they say that the dramatic critic must "sit tight" against the prejudices of the crowd, must preserve his own judgment; which is only another way of saying that the critic must be an artist like the dramatist he is criticizing; and this in turn is another way of saying that a play must be judged by its effect on an individual temperament, and *not* by "the peculiar psychology of the crowd." But unfortunately the demoralization which forty years ago Flaubert foresaw in all this *arcane théâtral*, all this

pedantry of "dramatic technique," of "dramaturgic skill," of *scènes à faire*, of the conditions of the theatre, the influence of the audience, and the conformation of the stage, this demoralization, I say, has overwhelmed the criticism of the drama. What the unities, decorum, *liaison des scènes*, and kindred petty limitations and restrictions were to dramatic theory in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these things are to criticism in the nineteenth and twentieth. They constitute the new pedantry, against which all æsthetic criticism, as well as all creative literature, must wage a battle for life.

How deeply this pedantry has permeated the criticism of our age becomes even more obvious when we examine the work of the æsthetic critics themselves. They cannot wholly subdue their minds to so mechanical a theory, but its phrases and formulæ they repeat in a sort of parrot-like fashion, even when in the next breath their truer understanding of poetry makes them

deny its truth. So Mr. Arthur Symons, for example, tells us that "a play is written to be acted, and it will not be literature merely because its sentences are nicely written; it will be literature, dramatic literature, if in addition to being nicely written, it has qualities which make a stage-play a good stage-play." And yet in the same book, dealing with a particular play, he says that "the piece was constructed entirely with a view to effectiveness, superficial effectiveness on the stage, and not according to the variable but quite capturable logic of human nature; . . . as a thing to be acted, not as life, not as drama." This final jumble may be capped by a sentence of Mr. Laurence Binyon's, which might well serve as a minute master-piece of confused æsthetic thinking: "If poets mean to serve the stage, their dramas must be dramatic." What can this mean except that if poets wish to make the theatre successful, they must write plays that

will make the theatre successful? Or if it does not mean that, what else can it mean that is not equally meaningless? But to serve the theatre in any practical sense is not an æsthetic aim, and can never be the aim of a poet; there is only one way in which he can serve it well, and that is to express the best there is in him, and that only. The answer to Mr. Symons at his worst may well come from Mr. Symons at his best. No one has expressed that answer more clearly than he: "To you, as to me, whatever has been beautifully wrought, by whatever craftsman, and in whatever manner of working, if only he has been true to himself, to his own way of realizing the things he sees, that, to you as to me, is a work of art."

Regarding the theatre, therefore, not as a place of amusement (although in that too it has of course its justification as much as golf or tennis), not as a business undertaking (in which case we should have to consider the box-office receipts as the test

of a play's excellence), not as an instrument of public morality (since our concern here is not with ethics or sociology), but regarding it solely as the home or the cradle of a great art, what do we find its relations to dramatic criticism? Merely this, that for æsthetic criticism the theatre simply does not exist. For criticism, a theatre means only the appearance at any one time or in any one country, as Croce puts it, of a "series of artistic souls." When these artistic souls appear, theatres will spring up like mushrooms to house them, and the humblest garret will serve as an eyrie for their art. But all these external conditions are merely dead material which has no æsthetic significance outside of the poet's soul; and only in the poet's art should we seek to find them.

No misconception of art is so persistent as this confusion between inner impulse and outer influence. A poet, let us say, finds that a brisk walk stimulates his writing, or that he can write more easily

when he has smoked a cigarette. The walk or the cigarette has not produced the poetry; it has simply served as a stimulus to the personality that creates the poetry. It opens the faucet, but who would be so foolish as to maintain that it produces or alters the water that gushes forth? Other poets find that they cannot write easily without the stimulus of imagined reward,—money, the plaudits of the crowd, the resplendent beauty of theatrical performance. But men with the same ambitions write different poems or plays, and in this difference lies the real secret of art. For after all, whatever the imaginary stimulus, there is only one real urge in the poet's soul, to express what is in him, to body forth his own vision of reality as well as he can. To say, therefore, that playwrights write for the stage, that poets write for money, that painters paint to be "hung," is to confuse mere stimulus with creative impulse.

For Mr. William Archer this distinction,

one of the most fundamental of all distinctions in criticism, is a mere dispute between Tweedledum and Tweedledee; and so it may well seem to a connoisseur of stale platitudes, angered and confused by the thought of a new age impatient at his commonplaces. For him the relation of the drama to the theatre is exactly the same as that of a ship to the sea. A play is "a ship destined to be launched in a given element, the theatre. Here," he adds, "Mr. Spingarn will at once interrupt, and say that many plays are not so destined." But Mr. Spingarn says nothing of the kind. What he really says is that, rightly considered, *no* plays are so destined. Every poet in the world may or may not have written poems for money; it is a problem for the young and not too discreet tyro in the economic interpretation of history; but what concern is it of the critic? For him no poem is written for money. When we find that Mr. Archer simply cannot understand what this

means,—when we find that he cannot comprehend the distinction between utility and beauty, between stimulus and creative impulse, between the mechanical science of ship-building and the spiritual act of artistic creation,—what can we say to him? What is it possible to say except that such a critic needs, not refutation, but a new education?

So after wandering through the centuries we return at last to the collection of theatrical antiquities in the American University. What has æsthetic speculation from Aristotle to Croce to tell us about this so-called “dramatic museum”? Why, that it contains either too little or too much. Too much, from the standpoint of dramatic criticism, which is concerned with externals, including the theatre, only in so far as they appear in dramatic literature itself. Too little, from the standpoint of the history of culture, because the theatre is only one, and a very insignificant one, of all the influences that

have gone to make up dramatic literature.

If we examine the life of any dramatist from Æschylus to Andreyev, or any play from *Sakuntala* to the *Playboy of the Western World*, we shall find a thousand influences affecting in some measure the artist and his work. *Hamlet*, for instance, is the work of a man whose father (let us say) was a butcher, and whose mother a gentlewoman; obviously, to understand a man of this sort, we should study the effect of his early visits to the butcher's shop on his later work, the influence of gentle birth on character, and the general problem of heredity. Our dramatic museum will be incomplete unless it contain books covering all these topics. The play is written by an Englishman, and who can tell what influence this fact may have had on the nature of the play? Surely the museum should provide us with histories of England, Warwickshire, Stratford, London, and with every conceivable book on the

life and habits of the English people. Hamlet is the son of a king, and we should, of course, understand the ideals of royalty and of government in general in order to appreciate the ideas influencing Shakespeare in writing the play; we need a whole library of political science. Moral ideas are discussed throughout the play; where did they come from? The museum should furnish us with a library on the history of ethics. Hamlet is rather coarse in his language to Ophelia, and in numerous other ways reflects the Renaissance conception of woman and the position of women; so we realize that our museum would be incomplete without a whole library on woman, on social usages and customs, on dress, and heaven only knows what else.

But why continue? If the museum wishes to furnish us with the external material which influenced dramatic literature, it should furnish us with all the books, all the men, all the things, that have existed side by side with the drama from the be-

ginning of its history and before; for all of these men, or books, or things may have had a larger and deeper influence than the physical theatre. But this, after all, is a problem of the history of culture and not of criticism. If we wish to understand dramatic literature itself, we must seek understanding in the great plays and not in the dead material out of which plays are made.

A collection of theatrical bric-à-brac may interest and enlighten many men,—actors, impresarios, stage-managers, playwrights, antiquaries, dilettanti of all sorts, even University teachers of dramatic literature, and who shall say how many others? This essay challenges, not the museum's usefulness, still less its right to existence, but only the theory of which it is a concrete expression; and from this point of view it may well serve another useful purpose, of which its founders perhaps took no thought,—as a sort of literary “chamber of horrors,” a permanent symbol of the false

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theories which have encumbered the dramatic criticism of our time. For the true dramatic critic will transfer his interest from the drama itself to the "laws of the theatre" or the "conditions of the theatre" only when the lover studies the "laws of love" and the "conditions of love" instead of his lady's beauty and his own soul.

PROSE AND VERSE

PROSE AND VERSE

NOTHING could more completely prove the poverty of American criticism, its dependence on the decayed and genteel traditions of Victorian England, and its hopeless chaos in the face of new realities of art, than the recent discussions of the freer forms of verse. Both the friends and the enemies of *vers libres* have confined themselves within the limits of this narrow tradition; and the loudest advocates of modernity have defended their taste with the same stale platitudes as its foes. It is only because criticism always follows in this timid and halting way the new paths marked by the footsteps of poets, that we need not assume it to be a national trait rather than a universal failing.

It would be useless to take cognizance of all these outworn arguments, or to concern ourselves with the merely external

history of these freer forms, from the days when Commodianus was accused of playing havoc with the traditional music of the Latin hexameter. But one of the most extraneous arguments must be dismissed at the outset. The admirers of *vers libres* have praised them because they are "democratic," while some of their enemies have actually found fault with them because they are "undemocratic," because they lack the regular beats which the true poetry of the people has always employed for communal effort. But democracy is a political ideal, and since when has a political ideal acquired the right to be regarded as a touchstone for poets? Dante's Roman Imperialism, Shakespeare's aristocracy, Carducci's republicanism, Shelley's democracy, all prove that one political ideal is as good as another as material for poetry, and that the problem for criticism to attack is not the political ideals of the poet but the poetry which he has made out of them. To go still farther, and to make

politics a touchstone of rhythm and metre, is to leave the world of criticism and to enter that of Alice in Wonderland, where we might expect the talent of a poet to be tested by his opinions on the canals in Mars, or by his ability to eat as many oysters as the Walrus and the Carpenter. Only in a world where commas are Buddhist and exclamation points Mohammedan will it be reasonable to ask whether iambs and trochees are democratic or the reverse. How can poetry, or any form in which it expresses itself, whose very right to existence depends on its life, its reality, its imaginative power, be judged by a mere abstraction? It is the ever recurring malady of critics,—to formulate new abstractions on the basis of a dead art, and to “wish them” on the artists of a day still living.

No, if we wish to understand the ever changing forms of art, we must subdue our minds to every new expression, before we can hope to rise above it, and explain, in

ever new and changing syntheses, its real meaning and the secret of its power. The direction which this new synthesis must take in the case of *vers libres* may best be understood after analyzing and explaining some older and outworn ones.

Over two thousand years ago the question of the relationship of poetry and prose was opened for discussion by the Greeks, and the problem, as they stated it, is still agitating the minds of men to-day. The weightiest of Greek arguments amounts to this: that the test of poetry is not the use of prose or verse, but imaginative power, for if metre were the real test, a rhymed treatise on law or medicine would be poetry and a tragedy in prose would not. This is Aristotle's thesis, and no critic or thinker in these two thousand years has been able to reason it away. But neither Aristotle nor any of his successors through the centuries has ever doubted the separate existence of prose and verse; those who admit his argument and those who deny

it alike agree in conceiving of prose and verse as separate and distinct entities, each with its own characteristics and its own life. Poetry and verse may or may not be identical terms for them, but for all of them prose and verse are different and distinct. But are prose and verse different and distinct? Modern thinking has something new to say on this subject, and something that leads us to a new attitude toward the whole question of versification.

It is always safest to attack a problem first on its most external and superficial side; and so we may begin by examining some examples of the infinite variety of rhythm in human speech. Here is a couplet from Pope's early *Pastorals*:

“Let vernal airs through osiers play,
And Albion's cliffs resound the lay.”

Regularity in rhythm could hardly go farther; there is an almost mathematical succession of beats or accents. But in

these lines from a blank verse play of Beaumont and Fletcher there is less regularity:

“I’ll look thee out a knight shall make thee a
lady too,
A lusty knight, and one that shall be ruled by
thee;
And add to these, I’ll make ’em good. No
mincing,
No ducking out of nicety, good lady,
But do it home.”

We can follow the faint shadow of regular metre through these lines, but they certainly do not follow the accepted conception of blank verse. The *Spoon River Anthology* goes a step farther:

“Over and over they used to ask me,
While buying the wine or the beer,
In Peoria first, and later in Chicago,
Denver, Frisco, New York, wherever I lived,
How I happened to live the life,
And what was the start of it.”

Some haunting sense of metre is here too, not the regular succession of classical tra-

dition, but still some pattern of music in the mind of the artist that we can search for and discover. Shall we say that there is no sense of regular rhythm, fainter but still present, in this passage from De Quincey's prose:

"The case / was the same / precisely / as when / Ricardo announced / beforehand / that we should neglect / the variations / in the value / of money. / What could be / the use / of stating / every / proposition / as to price / three times over; / first, / in the contingency / of money / remaining / stationary; / secondly, / in the contingency / of its rising; / thirdly, / in the contingency / of its falling? / Such / an eternal fugue / of iterations, / such / a Welsh triad of cases, / would treble / the labor / of writer / and reader, / without doing / the slightest / service / to either. / "

These four examples illustrate, as well perhaps as a thousand, the variations and gradations of rhythm used by men in expressing their thoughts. They differ in the *degree* of their regularity of rhythm,

but there is no place where we can sharply divide them in respect to their essential nature, and say that here verse ends and here prose begins. All we can say is that out of the infinite variations of rhythm, we may conveniently classify the more irregular as prose and the more regular as verse.

We may go still further and take two lines in which two poets appear to aim at the same succession of beats or accents,—where they have apparently used the same “metre.” Compare this line of Shakespeare:

“In his study of imagination”

with this of Milton:

“Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and
shades of death.”

In theory these lines conform to the same metrical arrangement. Both are in blank verse, with the same traditional succession of five accented feet; yet who can fail to

see that they differ from each other as widely as Pope's verse from DeQuincey's prose? But we need not go to two different poets; if we take any two succeeding lines from the same poet, in the same poem, and in what would be conventionally called the same metre, though the difference may not be so striking, we are forced to the same conclusion:

"Thy rare gold ring of verse (the poet praised)
Linking our England to his Italy."

So that not only is there no sharp line dividing prose and verse, but whatever distinction exists between words in metre and words without it exists in exactly the same way between verses written in the same metre.

But the problem is, after all, far more fundamental than that. It has been touched only on its most external, indeed on a wholly negligible, side, and the questions that go to the heart of the whole matter have not yet been asked: In what

sense can we say that verses written in the same metre,—the four just quoted, or any others that might possibly be quoted,—have anything in common merely because there is a somewhat similar succession of syllables and accents? In what sense does this purely external resemblance help to explain their music, their meaning, or their power? When we are concerned with this external resemblance, however great we may admit the resemblance to be, are we not occupied with quite another problem than the one which is the real concern of criticism, the problem of the special and unique quality of a poet's work?

To answer these questions is to lift the discussion out of the arid field of versification into the realm where it rightly belongs, that of æsthetic criticism and æsthetic thought. This is where the discussion has of late been lifted by a group of modern thinkers, and this is where it must hereafter remain. For they have made clear the fundamental dis-

tinction between the mechanical whirr of machinery, or the ticking of a clock, and the inner or spiritual rhythm of human speech. They have made clear that only physical things can be measured, and that what can be so measured in a poet's verse, or in any work of art, is without artistic value, and a matter of complete indifference for all true criticism. They have made it clear, in a word, that rhythm and metre must be regarded as æsthetically identical with style, as style is identical with artistic form, and form in its turn is the work of art in its spiritual and indivisible self. Only those who regard style, or form, as something that can be added to, or subtracted from, a work of art, will ever again conceive of metre as something separate from the life of the poem itself, as a poet's dainty trills or *coloratura* instead of the music of his whole manner of being.

Yet poetry is not unlike all the other facts of life; it is possible to approach it from

many angles, to study it from many points of view. You love a friend; you admire his charm of manner, his frankness or his courtesy, his honor or honesty, his intelligence, his taste, his buoyant spirits, his handsome face, even his glowing health; but ultimately you love him for the personality that makes him himself, the personality that is compounded of all these qualities yet is independent of them all. But you recognize that it is possible and proper to consider him in any one of these ways by itself, and even in others. He is a human being, and the anatomist or physiologist can tell you secrets of his bones and blood that are hidden from you. You do not doubt the value of anatomy or physiology, in its own field, when you say that it can tell you nothing to explain why you loved this particular friend so naturally and so well.

Poetry, too, can be studied as a dead thing no less than as a living and breathing power. The words and syllables of

which it is compounded may be counted, tabulated, and analyzed; the succession of its external accents may be enumerated and compared; the history of each word traced back to some ancient source. Etymology, versification, syntax are respectable sciences, and have their proper place in the wide field of human knowledge. They are the anatomy or physiology of poetry. But they do not help us to understand the secret of poetic power, for the simple reason that poetic power is independent of accidental and external resemblances. The fact that two lines have the same external succession of beats or accents, conform or do not conform to the same "metre," follow or do not follow some traditional system of versification, tells us no more about their intrinsic quality as poetry than the fact that two men have the same bones or the same lymphatic system tells us about their special qualities as statesmen, as friends, or as men.

What is true of metre is also æsthetically true of language itself. To speak of "learning a language" is to risk the danger of the same confusion, for we do not learn language, we learn how to create it. That is why it is so wide of the mark to explain English words in terms of their continental antecedents, or to justify modern slang on the ground of its similarity to some foreign or classical usage. It has recently been urged, for example, that "to sail into a man" is a vivid and powerful phrase, because (of all reasons!) the Latinism "to inveigh against a man" means the same thing. But the Latinism in this case helps to explain the English phrase as much as the disinterred skeleton of a thirteenth century English yeoman helps to explain the personality of John Masefield. To deal with abstract classifications instead of artistic realities,—versification instead of poetry, grammar instead of language, technique instead of painting,—is to confuse form as concrete expres-

sion with form as an ornament or a dead husk.

The essential truth, then, is this,—that poets are forever creating new rhythms, not reproducing old ones, a feat only possible for the phonograph. It will always be convenient and proper to identify and classify the new rhythms by their superficial resemblance to the old ones; and so we shall continue to speak of “anapæsts,” “trochees,” “heroic couplets,” or “blank verse,” at least until better terms are invented, just as we speak of tall men and short men, large books and small books, without assuming that the adjectives imply fundamental distinctions of quality or character. But a classification intended merely for convenience can never furnish a vital basis for criticism; and for criticism the question of versification, as something separate from the inner texture of poetry, simply does not exist.

CREATIVE CONNOISSEUR-
SHIP

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(Letter to an Artist on the International Exhibition, February, 1913)

“To enjoy is, as it were, to create; to understand is a form of equality, and the full use of taste is an act of genius.”—John La Farge’s *Considerations on Painting*.

The opening night of the International Exhibition seemed to me one of the most exciting adventures I have experienced, and this sense of excitement was shared by almost every one who was present. It was not merely the stimulus of color, or the riot of sensuous appeal, or the elation that is born of a successful venture, or the feeling that one had shared, however humbly, in an historical occasion. For my own part, and I can only speak for myself, what moved me so strongly was

this: I felt for the first time that art was recapturing its own essential madness at last, and that the modern painter and sculptor had won for himself a title of courage that was lacking in all the other fields of art.

For after all, though it needs repeating in every civilization, madness and courage are the very life of all art. From the days of Plato and Aristotle, who both shared the Greek conception of genius as a form of madness, to the Elizabethan poet who said of Marlowe:

“For that fine madness still he did retain
Which rightly should possess a poet’s brain”;

and from the sturdy and robust Dryden,
with his

“Great wits are sure to madness near allied,”

to the living poet who writes

“He ate the laurel and is mad,”

all who have given any real thought to art or beauty have recognized this essential truth,—seeing in the poet's "madness" not something for the physician to diagnose, but fancy's eternal contrast with the common sense of a practical world. "Sense, sense, nothing but sense!" cried the German poet; "as if poetry in contrast with prose were not always a kind of nonsense." The virtue of an industrial society is that it is always more or less sane. The virtue of all art is that it is always more or less mad. All the greater is our American need of art's tonic loveliness, and all the more difficult is it for us to recapture the inherent madness without which she cannot speak or breathe.

You, I know, will not confuse this theory of poetic madness, to which poets themselves have given their faith, with the pseudo-scientific theories, current not many years ago, which pictured poets as "degenerate," "neurotic," or "mentally unbalanced." You will not confuse spirit-

ual exaltation with physical disease. For the madness of poets is nothing more or less than unhampered freedom of self-expression. Those of us for whom self-expression is checked by inner or outer inhibitions must always look with something of amazement at those who can and do express themselves freely. For us they must always seem "mad." To let one's self go—that is what art is always aiming at, and American art needs most of all. It is in this sense that America needs the tonic madness of poets.

But here was the poet's madness, and here was courage that did not fear to be mad. I confess that when I left the exhibition my feeling was not merely one of excitement, but mingled with it was a real depression at the thought that no other artists shared this courage of the painters of our time. How timid seemed our poetry and our drama and our prose fiction; how conventional and pusillanimous our literary and dramatic criticism;

how faded, and academic, and anæmic every other form of artistic expression. But these painters and sculptors had really dared to express themselves. Wrong-headed, mistaken, capricious, some of them may be; but at least they have the *sine qua non* of art, the courage to express themselves without equivocating with their souls. Some of them may have forgotten that the imagination is governed by an inner logic of its own, and not by unreasonable caprice; but even caprice is better than tameness, even caprice is better than the lifeless logic of the schools.

And this leads me to what is really the inspiring cause of this letter, to the question that must occur to every mind: What have the patrons of art, the great American collectors, who are the envy and target of the world, what have they done for this exhibition, or for the artists who give it its flavor and power, and especially for the younger American artists who had the imagination and skill to bring it together?

Did the masters of our national sanity encourage any of this divine madness; did they grapple with the pioneer work that you men are doing; or have they preferred to make timid but solid investments in the art whose original madness has been tamed, and placed beyond all question, by time?

We have heard altogether too much of the service which has been rendered by these "fake Lorenzo de' Medicis" of our time. I am tired of hearing that they have despoiled Europe and Asia of their treasures, and have filled not only their own homes, but public museums and libraries, with models of older beauty. I have lived many hours in that Renaissance of which Lorenzo was one of the flowers; and when I come back to my own country I find nothing that gives me less hope for its future than these very patrons and collectors who would ape his glory. For the very essence of his power is hidden from them. The soul of his purpose is at war

with theirs. Theirs is at bottom acquisitiveness, his at bottom creativeness. For (it cannot be repeated too often) to enjoy and understand a work of art is to own it, in the only sense in which art takes cognizance of ownership; there is no other way to possess it except to live again the vision which the artist creates. But under all the garments that hide their purpose and make it fair, the desire to "shop", the hunger for other forms of property beside real estate and stocks and bonds, remain their real and unmistakable motives. His motive was as different from theirs as the sexual passion, creating life even without knowing it, is different from the desire to own slaves.

For look at Lorenzo's palace. Political and financial intrigue as real as any in the offices of the "interests" was harbored there. But inside the same palace lived poets and scholars, philosophers and painters, architects and engineers. All the world knows his architect Brunelleschi,

his philosophers Ficino and Landino, his poets Poliziano and Luigi Pulci, his scholars Pico della Mirandola and Barbaro, not to mention the horde of painters and craftsmen who haunted his city and his house. Poliziano, one of the loveliest of all Italian poets, seems almost the product of his patronage, if it is proper to speak of a beautiful flower as the "product" of the gardener who waters it and gives it a fruitful soil. *He* did not merely load his rooms with the dead weight of dead centuries; *he* created, and fostered creation in others. And yet this was a merchant prince, like our own merchant princes; the inheritor of no greater power than theirs, the holder of no official position in the State that the prestige of his family did not earn for itself in the democracy of Florence.

But where is Morgan's Poliziano, where is Widener's Ficino? Where are the poems they have themselves written, as Lorenzo wrote his own *Ambra*, his own lovely

Nencia da Barbarino? Where are the pageants and dramas they have composed or fostered, where the popular Muse (out of the mouths of the very rabble) that they have encouraged and refined? Where are the painters and scholars, poets and philosophers, dreamers and craftsmen of all kinds, who haunt their houses in the real intimacy that the old Renaissance fostered between prince and genius? While the Medicis made all Florence fertile with artistic life, these Americans, these fake Medicis,—so full of a power that seems dynamic and creative in the field of action, so colorless and timid in the field of taste,—have merely hung cold treasures in coy corners of remote aloofness that are now their graves as well as their homes.

But connoisseurship has its living as well as its dead side. If we were merely concerned with a craft that, in the presence of beautiful pictures, asked nothing but their age, their genuineness, their previous ownership, the meaning of their symbols

and signatures, we might dismiss it without ado from our thoughts. For these are all problems with little or no æsthetic significance, and have hardly more importance than the question of commercial values. But it is on a wholly different side that connoisseurship may become dynamic and creative. The collector, the patron, the critic have their common meeting ground in the realm of taste. To understand and enjoy beauty is their common bond; to re-create in their own souls the artist's vision of reality is at once their triumph and their joy. If they really express their own taste, instead of aping the taste of others, the work they do may be said to be creative like the artist's. Only this creative flowering of their own personalities may be called taste in any real sense; only this creative taste has a value for themselves or others.

For after all, patrons and collectors, prizes and rewards, boards and foundations have no significance for the artist, but only for

the society which they represent. For art is not a flower that needs only watering and a fruitful soil to make it flourish; the gardener's kindly help is just as likely to kill it as to give it a new vigor. The parable of the poet who withers in a gilded chamber is the perennial symbol of art. Nothing outside of it seems really to help or to hinder; out of its own life it musters the mysterious power that helps it to speak or to be silent. So it is for their own sake, and not for the artist's, that the patron and the collector should cultivate the madness of poets. They may enrich the life and culture of the society of which they are a part, even though they can render no service to art. This is true of democracies as well as aristocracies: whether the patrons and collectors be few or many, whether they be rich or poor, whether they belong to a narrow circle to which the countersign is an heirloom from the past or include the whole wide range of human life, the problem re-

mains exactly the same. Sympathy for self-expression, and the power to understand and enjoy it, are independent of government in its varying forms; they are spiritual realities, and live in a world in which political abstractions and administrative details are merely shadows. That is why the flowering of taste remains always a symbol of the higher life of every age and every civilization.

So our patrons and collectors, our amateurs and dilettanti, and all who wish to share the artist's vision of reality, can do something for America, and still more for themselves, without waiting for tomorrow. They can attend the International Exhibition; they can learn its lessons and enjoy or buy its pictures. They can share the artist's "madness," if only for a few heightened moments, and by their oneness with him in spirit once more justify the essential equality of genius and taste. They can help to make collecting itself a creative art, instead of a miser's hoarding

lust. It is a choice between artistic life and artistic stagnation or death; and if you and your colleagues had done nothing more than to make possible, for us to-day, this ideal of creative collecting, the time and energy and insight you have spent on this work would be more than worth while.

APPENDIX

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A NOTE ON GENIUS AND TASTE

SOME time ago, Mr. John Galsworthy took issue with the theory, advanced in "The New Criticism," in regard to the identity of genius and taste. He found "the 'new critic's' point of view most interesting," but he felt that it expressed "something that is not quite the truth." For him there is no fundamental resemblance between the critic and the creator, and he sums up the difference between them by saying that the critic "is absolutely tied to the terms of the work that he is interpreting, whereas the very essence of creation is that roving, gathering, discovering process of mind and spirit which goes before the commencement of a work of art. This process is untrammelled by anything except the limits of the artist's own personality. The real creative artist is in these words of brusquer stuff."

This is a very pretty distinction; but even if it did not involve a serious misconception of the function of æsthetic criticism, it would

certainly eliminate some very great works of art from the category of "creation." In what sense, for instance, is the portrait painter less trammelled by his subject than the critic by his books or pictures? The painter re-creates the men and women who are sitting before him, he does not merely reproduce them; but criticism, if it performs its true function, re-creates in the same way the work of art which is the subject of its interpretation. Mr. Galsworthy would hardly say that the portrait painter is not a creator, because he is trammelled or limited by something beside his own personality, at least to the same extent as the critic,—because his own personality cannot wholly escape from the fate imposed upon it by the likeness of the sitter. Who would dare to say that Velasquez's portrait of Philip IV, Raphael's Castiglione, Rembrandt's portrait of himself, Manet's Zola, and Renoir's Daughters of Catulle Mendès, or the superb Chinese portraits of the T'ang and Sung periods that antedate yet equal them all, are not works of art, are criticism and not creation, merely because the "roving, gathering, discovering process of mind" is not so obvious in them as in some other forms of art?

But Mr. Galsworthy has answered that question himself. The very work of art which he cites as "the finest piece of creative painting

in the world," La Gioconda, is the portrait of a Neapolitan lady, Monna Lisa, wife of Zanobi del Giocondo. Heaven forbid that we should say that it is *merely* a portrait, as Mr. Galsworthy seems to think the critic's "portrait" of Shakespeare or Shelley is merely a portrait! But if Mr. Galsworthy must seek his supreme work of art from the very form which is most trammelled and least "roving" or "gathering," he has destroyed his own argument; and he seems to have recognized this himself, for in developing the same thought since, in the *Inn of Tranquillity*, he has sought security by omitting all his earlier illustrations. Some forms of art are more "roving" and "gathering" than others, but limitations or trammels of this sort have nothing to do with the vital essence that distinguishes art from non-art. When the critic's vision reaches beyond the single artist to the artists of a whole period or a whole nation, and aims at a series of portraits embodying the artistic life of a people in a single framework, the possibilities of selection and discovery are as great as in any novel. Only those familiar with a supreme work of criticism like the history of Italian literature by Francesco de Sanctis can realize the wide range of selective skill and imaginative power possible for criticism at its amplest and best.

Neither do Mr. Galsworthy's other illustrations bear out his theories. Contrast, he says, a creative work like Leonardo's picture with a critical work like Pater's essay about the picture, and you will discover that the picture and the essay illustrate two types of temperament, the creative and the critical; one is of brusquer stuff than the other. But to me this proves little except the difference between two widely different personalities. It needs little argument to prove that the "universal man" of the Renaissance is made of brusquer stuff than the Victorian "don." Leonardo and Michelangelo are of brusquer stuff than Millais and Leighton. The Renaissance critics whom Nisard has called "literary gladiators" are of brusquer stuff than Raphael and Correggio. But this does not touch the problem of the two arts, and it would not be difficult, I think, to point out that the art of Leonardo and the art of Pater are not so wide apart as Mr. Galsworthy appears to believe; that both are trammelled by their subject-matter in the same way, but that both are alike really untrammelled, for both works re-create their "subjects" through the personality of the artist, and both are, in their different ways, creative works of art.

But if the discussion must be limited to externals, suppose that instead of Leonardo and

Pater, I select Goethe's critique of *Hamlet* in *Wilhelm Meister* and Matthew Arnold's poem of *Obermann*. Which of these is made of brusquer stuff? Which exhibits "curiosity" and the other characteristics of Mr. Galsworthy's creator, and which the "ruminative introspection, the necessary egoism" which he selects as the earmarks of the critic? In what sense is Goethe's "temperament" here distinctly critical in Mr. Galsworthy's sense, and Arnold's distinctly creative? Surely Goethe's critique ("the very poetry of criticism," as Carlyle, echoing Schlegel, calls it) has all the characteristics of the conventional "creator," Arnold's poem all those of the conventional "critic." This, I take it, explains Mr. Galsworthy's position: he has in mind a conventional conception of the critic and another conventional conception of the creator, and he has selected two artists, more or less at random, because they seem to illustrate this conventional antithesis. But it must be clear that the problem is not so simple as all this, and a mind so "roving, gathering, discovering" as Mr. Galsworthy's cannot long remain contented with an arbitrary and outworn theory of art.

Genius and taste no longer mean for us what they meant to the poets and critics of the Romantic period. Their halo, their mystery,

their power are gone. By genius is now merely meant the creative faculty, the power of self-expression, which we all share in varying degrees. By taste is meant the power to see and understand and enjoy the self-expression of others, a power which all of us must in some measure share or no art would be intelligible; all of us have something at least of what Sainte-Beuve calls "that faculty of semi-metamorphosis, which is at once the play and the triumph of criticism." We are all geniuses; we are all possessed of taste. To say that the two faculties are in their essence one is not, however, to say that criticism and creation are without difference; it is merely to recognize the element of fundamental kinship. For it still remains true that the æsthetic critic, in his moments of highest power, rises to heights where he is at one with the creator whom he is interpreting. At that moment criticism and "creation" are one. That the critic does not always live on this high level of taste and feeling need not be disputed; even Homer nods, even the greatest creators of the world sink to levels of less than creative power. But that is their function, that is their goal; and it is only from this point of vantage that the great critic can understand and interpret the great "creator."

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